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# Kim's Game

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It is habitual, when reviewing a book about the Secret Service, to describe one's inside knowledge of it - since everyone of my generation, during World War II, seems to have entered its portals, however briefly, and ineffectively. On return from Gibraltar in 1944, after two years as an NCO in ordinary unesoteric Army Intelligence, I was asked by our regimental depot if I wanted a Special Job. 'You bet (sir),' I said. This took me on the pilgrimage that has so often been described: the abrupt Major at the War House who gives you an address and says, 'Don't tell anybody'; the interview at Broadway (or Universal Exports), in a cubby-hole, with a piercing-eyed Major who weighs you up; then the arrival at Ryder Street, which housed Mr Philby's Section V.

The only slight interest of my own brief encounter is that I went in lower, and came out quicker, than I would guess anyone else. For a while, I was immensely impressed with Ryder Street - for this, after all, was it. Then, as so many have related, I went through a second period: 'Surely these people can't be the Secret Service - there must be another one for which this weird place is cover.' Before a month was over, I knew I wanted out.

One reason was wounded vanity. I did not like those young ladies from the shires who addressed me like a footman ('MacInnes, fetch me a taxi'). As for the Operators, both male and sometimes female, they struck me as mostly nut cases, and as I am one myself, I am a good judge of this. Nor was I much impressed by what, so far as I could make out, they were up to: in fact, the heretical thoughts grew in me that it was dangerous and childish, and not going to win any war for us. So I 'resigned', and amid a flurry of hysteria (mine), reproach (theirs), and security de-briefings, I was sent back to the Army in disgrace. The Army promoted me, and sent me to Normandy where I had a more or less normal war.

Mr Trevor-Roper, in his *The Philby Affair*,\* is right in correcting the understandable thought that secret intelligence work is ludicrous. His analysis of what it can and should do, and what it cannot but often tries to, is sensible and revealing, and I think he is right to suggest that it was partly because the SIS had strayed from its primal task, which was to gather hard intelligence and indulge less in 'intelligence' as

an end in itself, that Philby was able, with his greater realism, to deceive it for so long.

Mr Trevor-Roper's book is in other respects admirable. He has given us an analysis informed by inner knowledge, a historical and political sense, a moral instinct and, most of all, great common sense. His thoughts about 'how Philby did it', and why, and what he is up to now, seem to me unanswerable, though such is the public fascination with spies, just because they are successful spies, that I doubt if anyone much will listen to him.

For Kim's great success - perhaps his greatest - is that he has, thanks to the human failing of wanting legends and not reality, succeeded in making himself legendary: the acres written about him - or the fact that I am writing this and you are reading it - is a proof of this. Why, he even rates a section in Allen Dulles's *Great True Spy Stories*† - most of which are neither great nor true, in fact opaque and meaningless; but the public, doubtless, will gobble up these murky tales.

And so we come to Kim's *My Silent War*‡ - not all that silent now. It has an introduction by Graham Greene which makes three astounding statements:

This is not at all the book that Philby's enemies anticipated.

It is an honest one . . .

We were told to expect a lot of propaganda, but it contains none . . .

It seems to me exactly the book his enemies would have anticipated (if they had a brain in their heads) - and even more, his friends. It is 'honest' if Mr Greene means the send-up of the SIS where it could be legitimately sent up, but not so as regards Kim's real activities (that would perhaps be asking too much), or his motivation, which is explained in terms of cliché. As for 'no propaganda', it is precisely a brilliant piece of that, since its object is to denigrate the SIS and the society it springs from, and to evoke the power and glory of the KGB and Soviets.

What emerges (among much else) from this smug and crafty book is that Kim, by implication, agrees with one of Mr Trevor-Roper's main points, which is that the great coups of secret intelligence do not derive so much from the mumbo-jumbo of conventional espionage, but from code-cracking and radio (also now satellite) interception. Better one egg-head who can break a code than fifty lost romantics whizzing about West Berlin. What also emerges, by implication, is that the real secret-service buff, which Mr Philby has trained himself to be, is ultimately, whatever his momentary suc-

cesses, expendable; and also, by acquired nature, untrustworthy.

For the trouble is that if Kim Philby is to be taken seriously as a man, rather than a highly effective instrument, his book reveals he is bereft of ideas, though cracks abound. He is certainly not a Marxist, in any meaningful sense: he is an operator. In my brief sojourn at Ryder Street, one quality - or defect - these brilliant lads all seemed to me to have in common was a lack of intellectual maturity. They were not men, but grown-up boys.

And so was the original Kim, the hero of Kipling's tale, who loved the Indians, as our Kim loves England, but betrayed them. And one reason was that Kim was Peter Pan with a hairy chest - the man-boy who never became a man. We have all met men of this type. They have laid more women, drunk more gins, beaten up more victims, than we would ever dare to do. But on closer acquaintance, it would seem they have not matured, emotionally, beyond the age of about fourteen: the age of gangs, fierce perverse loyalties, and betrayals.

Such adult boys are haunted by two imperatives that must make their lives: secrecy and power. But when they come to tell their story, if they do, after a first fascination by their clever amorality (for after all we, too, would like to have the courage of our weaknesses), we become disturbed, and then perhaps contemptuous. And what is most pathetic about their glory, and the harm that they can do and did, is that when we come to ask them why, from out of a forest of plausible evasions they cannot tell us, because they do not know.

\* *The Philby Affair* by HUGH TREVOR-ROPER  
Kimber 25s

† *Great True Spy Stories*, edited by ALLEN DULLES  
Collins 25s

‡ *My Silent War* by KIM PHILBY introduced by  
Graham Greene, MacGibbon & Kee, 30s